2: Campbell B, E-5 (1934-1935) 1937 ER6 Rural Irish ER6



342 The stone or earth-
en floor may be sprinkled for instance with coral beachsand to help in sweeping it.

[356] In some primitive houses, where the cattle still had their places, in the
[231] low end, I have found a gutter or conduit going across the low end and leading out through the door.

●333 *The walls.* There are two main types of wall construction representing very
342 old building traditions.

[172] 1. The dry stone walls, *fallaí fuara* — met with in the prehistoric buildings, *clochán*s etc. — are built of stones (often flattish) without mortar. Dwelling-houses which have been built with dry stone walls have in later times been covered both inside and outside with mortar, pl. XLIII: 1. The space between the bigger stones are often carefully filled up by small stones, *spallaí*.

Especially in Co. Clare I have admired the precision developed in the construction of the walls.

[172] 2. Of prehistoric origin are also the mud, clod or clay walls, *falla feidín*. A fantastic explanation of the term makes it equal to *falla ar feadh dín*, a wall that endures as long as the roof is kept properly thatched (Dinneen).

The clay was pulverized and made into a thick mortar by wetting it and mixing it with cut rushes or course sprat hay. The well built mud-wall houses form comfortable dwellings and it has happened that people have regretted leaving excellent thatched "mud walls" to live in cold stone-walled slatted dwellings.

342 The foundation of the walls is sometimes a pronunced feature of the house. Whilst the walls usually have a width of 1½, 2 or 3 feet, the foundation is wider, forming a shelf or broad step along the building serving as a pathway to the door. The foundation is sometimes not very dissimilar to some prehistoric house-foundations. In this connection I would like to remark that the pathway and nearest surroundings of the entrance door are sometimes
[171] paved by a mosaic of small cobble-stones from the sea-shore. This I have seen in costal districts in South West, and I suggest that it is the same kind of pavement as appears in Portugal, Madeira, Marocco and elsewhere at the border of the Atlantic And the Mediterranean Sea.

*Doors and windows.* In many primitive houses of to-day the construction of the door-opening is extremely archaic: flat stones serving as lintel and as threshold. The frame of the door is wooden.

The doors usually have bolts of wood and a hasp to close the door. A thick wooden beam can be placed across inside the door on stormy nights, certain holes in the wall at both sides of the door being made for this beam,

13:Evans K-5 (ca. 1940) 1957
ER6 Rural Irish ER6

# IX

## KILNS AND CLOCHAUNS

343 WHILE the timber building has almost entirely disappeared from the Irish scene, there survives an archaic
● 333 tradition of building in dry stone which is best illustrated in the humble structures erected for special purposes in or adjacent to the farmyard. Since stonework has a much better chance of survival than timber it is possible, even without excavation, to trace the descent of some of these small buildings through the ages. They include corbelled animal houses (clochauns), corn-drying kilns, sweat-houses and turf-shelters. We shall consider also small outhouses of sods or wattles, including soot-houses and animal shelters. Some of these, reduced in scale and status, are the successors of buildings once erected for higher purposes.

The clochauns of south-western Ireland, corbelled stone struc-
172 tures, nowadays used mainly for keeping pigs or poultry, are indis-
343 tinguishable from the monastic huts such as are found on the precipitous island of Skellig Michael off the coast of Co. Kerry. Similar stone huts accompany monastic settlements in other parts of Ireland—and also in the Hebrides and in islands off the coast of Brittany—and they have been preserved, thanks to their sanctity or their isolation, as examples of a mode of building which was common when Christianity reached the west. Some clochauns in the Dingle peninsula, Co. Kerry, have been erected within living memory, but we also know that this type of construction is far older than Christianity in Ireland, that it was already two millennia old when Christian converts adopted it for their dwellings and their oratories. It is probable that some of the megalith-builders lived in clochauns and that their magnificent corbelled tombs have alone survived because they

13:Evans K-5 (ca. 1940) 1957
ER6 Rural Irish ER6

## HOME-MADE THINGS

By far the most versatile of home-produced rope-making materials is straw. Rye straw is longer, softer and more flexible than any other, but very little rye is now grown save along the west coast where it is still the most popular thatching material. Wheat straw is the best substitute, but in fact most farmers must now depend on oat straw, thus 'tying up' some of their fodder. Straw rope (súgán) not only had many direct uses but served as the basis for such crafts as the making of mats, baskets, bee-skeps, mattresses, hen roosts, pigeons' nests and horse harness. It was used for seating chairs and making arm-chairs, and for a great variety of hobbles and tethers for animals and ties for holding down thatch. The fondness of the Irish for tethering and hobbling their livestock must be seen in the light of inadequate fences and the conditions of partnership farming in open fields. Not only the larger animals, but hens, turkeys, and geese were commonly restrained in this way. 'All livestock of the poorer man is in this sort of thraldom' wrote Arthur Young.[1] One may still see a tethered hen with her chickens that might have stepped out of the illuminated pages of the fourteenth century Luttrell Psalter. A straw rope stretched across the kitchen made a serviceable clothes-line. Torches were sometimes made from twisted straw; on the other hand, when suitably coated with mud, straw ropes made a fireproof smoke-canopy. Chopped straw or layers of straw ropes were also used in constructing mud walls, and it is possible that, as in Sweden, stakes wrapped in straw rope daubed in clay were once an alternative to 'wattle and daub' for wall building. It has been stated that the fowlers of the Mayo coast would let themselves down the cliffs on straw ropes,[2] which must have been exceptionally well made; ropes made from the fibres of bog fir were more reliable. In Co. Antrim fowling ropes were of horse hide, but bent ropes are also recorded.[3] I have seen countrymen on a windy fair day wearing an improvised belt over their long coats in the form of a straw rope, and in the early nineteenth century children in Co. Cork were described as 'clad in nothing except a coarse woollen shirt that came half way down the thighs and

[1]Arthur Young, *Tour*, 2, part 2, 87.
[2]P. Knight, *Erris in the Irish Highlands*, 55.
[3]R. Dobbs, *County Antrim in 1683*.

16:Messenger E-4,5 (1955-1966) 1969 ER6 Rural Irish ER6
(1959-1960) Inis Beag



172 may be much older. I was told that foreign collectors long ago purchased from the folk copper and bronze artifacts which had been exhumed from cave middens.

172 333 The Iron Age in Inis Beag is best represented by a fort constructed of limestone rocks quarried locally and fitted together without mortar, which bears no name other than the Irish word for fort—*Dún* (see Fig. 2). It commands the rim of a promontory, and its oval shape measures 170 by 127 feet. Unfortunately, from the point of view of the prehistorian, its inner wall was greatly reduced in height and any outer ramparts and stone *chevaux de frise* completely destroyed to furnish building materials for a medieval tower house which stands at its center. To the south about 500 feet, and on somewhat higher ground, are the remains of what may have been a monastery. According to island historians, it was pulled down by soldiers attacking the "castle" with cannons, and most of its stones were employed later in the construction of a watch tower nearby. Another monastery at the back of the island on the southeast side may indeed be the ruins of a fort, as the oldest of its three names bears the word fort.

## Medieval Period (500 to 1500)

17 The end of the Iron Age in Ireland is dated conveniently by historians as 431 (or 462), when St. Patrick arrived from Wales as a missionary to convert the pagan Celts. But, of course, prehistoric cultural elements persisted for many cen-

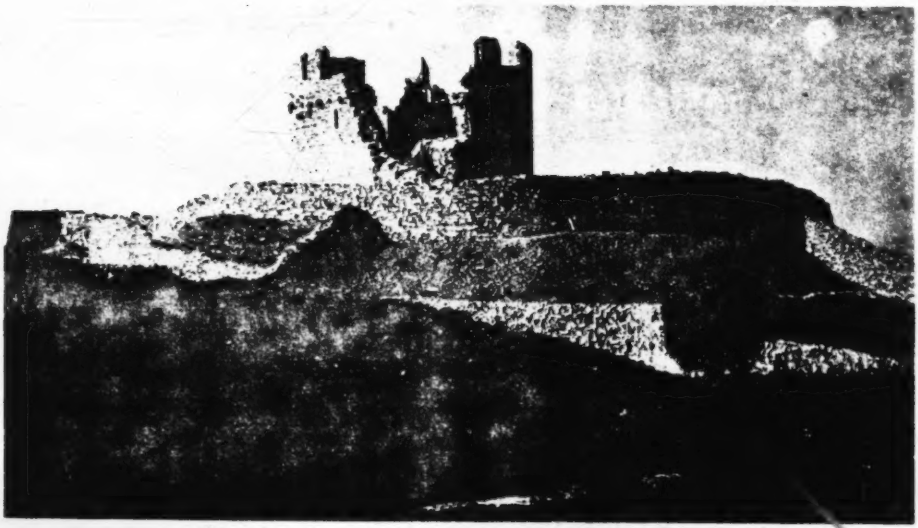


*Figure 2. Castle enclosed by the Iron Age promontory fort*

16:Messenger E-4,5 (1955-1966) 1969 ER6 Rural Irish ER6
(1959-1960) Inis Beag



823 [121] which give a trail its name. Folklorists have collected most of the place-names, and philologists have pondered the origins of no longer comprehended ones.

487 Trails also are referred to as roads or paths. Usually, they are bordered by stone fences from three to a dozen feet apart and are surfaced with fine gravel bound by clay. The 1842 Ordnance Survey Map shows that the network of trails in Inis Beag has remained much the same over the past century, although several [653] new paths have been added and all have been widened or otherwise improved. In recent years, the government has subsidized road improvement for several weeks each year during December and January. A senior and junior ganger supervise a group of fellow islanders—composed of those owning the gravel and clay deposits utilized, those owning land along the right of way, and those most needful of unemployment assistance—daily until the money appropriated for that year gives out. Nine major roads lead from the four villages to the back of the island; they roughly parallel each other and are reasonably straight once they climb the terraces. Crossing the middle of Inis Beag from one sound to the other necessitates traversing numerous fields and climbing high fences, since the four short paths running east and west linking five of the main roads at the back are found near the Atlantic shore. On the north side of the island, a road connects Terrace and Low Villages across the common land. This is the only major east to west artery and is the most traveled of the ten trails; passing between the cemetery and school, fences do not enclose it, and often drifting sand covers portions of it and must be shoveled away. A series of short connected paths make it possible to travel east and west along the terraces from one village to another above the main road.

312 Water is obtained from four principal wells near the villages and from numerous, less dependable springs at the back and along the shores of Inis Beag. Most householders also capture rain water from eaves troughs in barrels or small 312 cisterns. At one time, water was drawn from pools formed by the four major wells, 663 but now it is pumped from government built reservoirs. These reservoirs occasionally are broken open and water obtained directly from them by islanders who believe that the sealed structures and pipes leading from them to the pumps foster contamination. The government also sponsors the construction of water tanks in fields to accumulate rain water for pastured stock. Three of the wells are located in rift valleys, and the fourth is near the chapel; a potential fifth one is in the valley south of the lake, but at too great a distance from Terrace Village to have 312 been improved. Two minor unimproved springs used by villagers are situated on a terrace of the western promontory and below the post office. The springs near the coast and those at the back of the island are used mostly for watering stock, and they tend to become dry when rainfall is limited.

311 Inis Beag viewed from the top of the lighthouse presents a somber yet • [333] strangely moving panorama of grey limestone pavement and fences, with patches [241] of green here and there. Many hundreds of fields meet the eye, about half of which support little or no soil, ranging in size from a fraction of an acre to over a dozen 333 acres. Three decades ago, it was possible to move easily from east to west across [653] the back of the island because the fences averaged only three feet in height; but [178] since that time, government subsidies supporting fence and field building have caused most of them to be raised to heights of from five to ten feet. The folk are

16:Messenger E-4,5 (1955-1966) 1969 ER6 Rural Irish ER6
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skillful fence makers, and many incorporate various designs into their handiwork by using stones of different sizes and shapes. Stiles or openings in the fences connect a few fields, but gates seldom are employed; a man simply breaks down a stretch of fence to allow a horse or a cow to enter a pasture, then quickly rebuilds the fence. The outsider who believes this to be an easy task usually ends up with surplus stones, a disfigured fence, and maybe bruised fingers when he attempts to emulate the custom.

The hundreds of fields are located in dozens of land areas which bear names. Most writers assert that each plot has its own name, but in reality numerous fields are located in any one area. Thus, a man might send his son to dig potatoes in Garden of the Cobbler, that is, in the plot that he owns there; another man might go to milk a cow in his pasture in Garden of the Cobbler. A field will be assigned a new name only if its owner has another one in the same area, and then he might instead call it, for instance, New Field in the Garden of the Cobbler. Some land areas bear the names of persons and animals, others refer to geographical phenomena, while a few are linked to long forgotten historical events.

Over 50 coastal features also are named, from the Harbor of the Churchyard on the north, to Point of the Periwinkles on the south. Most of the place-names refer to rocks, flags, points, reefs, clefts, coves, channels, pools, low cliffs, events of the past, and small strands which mostly have disappeared. The freighter ran aground on a stony reef named Strand of the Sheep. This was a source of wry amusement to the rescued crew, but at one time the beach provided safe footing for sheep driven there to be washed before shearing or sale. One of the best known features is Piper's Rock, which figures prominently in legend. It is named after an island musician who long ago entered a cave above Terrace Village, which supposedly travels under the west sound and connects with another in Inis Thiar, and who never emerged again. In later years, bagpipe music was heard issuing forth from beneath the sea off the rock now named after the luckless fellow.

Inis Beag has four landing places for small craft along its shores, but none are large enough to accommodate the 550-ton government operated "steamer," which visits the island two to four times weekly. The main pier, also called the jetty, is 300 feet long and 15 feet wide and is protected on its windward side by a wall five feet high. Located just west of the strand (see Fig. 9), it is the third structure to occupy the site; the first pier was built in 1878 and the second in 1913, and the present one is an enlargement of its predecessor. Smaller piers are situated east of the lake, to provide Terrace Village access to the sea, and near the lighthouse. The former is used mostly to unload peat, or "turf," imported by hooker from the mainland and to carry passengers to and from the steamer, and the latter only to transfer supplies from Irish Lights Service vessels which anchor in the east sound. A slip on the west sound near Low Village is used by crews rowing between Inis Beag and Inis Thiar in their canoes. When tourists come ashore in the island, they usually do so for the thrill of riding the *curach* and viewing the more accessible historical sites and the much publicized folk; they remain only the hour or two that the steamer is anchored off the strand. Inis Beag has had regular steamer service since 1891, and before that time small sailing boats plied irregularly between island and mainland.

16:Messenger E-4,5 (1955-1966) 1969 ER6 Rural Irish ER6
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size from fourths to quarter-acres, located along the quarter that his community fronts. As a result of past inheritance and purchase, however, five Castle villagers own plots in one or two other quarters, as do five High and two Low villagers. Before field building commenced, the most extensive and fertile soils were found on the terraces; shallow and less widespread soils were situated just south of the terrace crest, while the back of the island was, and still is, mostly limestone pavement. Landholders originally were assigned equal acreage in each of these three areas, so that no one would have an advantage over his neighbors, and this pattern still predominates. The quarters are separated from one another by high, thick stone fences which run almost the length of Inis Beag, and, from west to east, they are known as Quarter of the *Phoillín* (derivation unknown), Quarter of the Ridge of Huts (after an ancient *clochán* settlement behind High Village), Quarter of the Castle, and Quarter of the Lake; they embrace, respectively, 271, 261, 240, and 263 acres.

Fifty-nine of the 71 householders in Inis Beag hold or own land, and one of these is an absentee holder. If an individual possesses four or fewer acres, he is regarded as landless—"a man of few gardens"—and 11 men are so designated. Two as yet unresolved disputes over the possession of land when resolved will add two other householders to the landless category, unless the property is divided in some manner among all four litigants by the Irish Land Commission. The folk prefer to rent rather than to own land, so that the commission will supervise matters relating to inheritance "fairly" and with little cost to the litigants should a dispute arise. The average sized Inis Beag holding is 15.7 acres, or approximately a croggery, and 25 islanders hold this amount of land; in addition, one person has 40 acres, three 32 acres, one 28 acres, eight 24 acres, eight 20 acres, four 12 acres, and nine 8 acres. Below is a chart summing up ownership data by village:

| | *Landholders and Owners* | *Landless Householders* | *Average Sized Holding (in acres)* |
|---|---|---|---|
| Low Village | 17 | 9 | 11.0 |
| High Village | 14 | 1 | 18.2 |
| Castle Village | 15 | 2 | 19.0 |
| Terrace Village | 13 | 1 | 16.4 |

The disproportionate number of landless persons in Low are, for the most part, either descendants of fisherfolk who centered in that community in earlier times and did not possess land, or siblings of landholders who chose not to emigrate. They support themselves by craft work, keeping tourists, fishing, managing shops, and working for the government, among other pursuits.

## Farming

There is neither legendary nor historical evidence of when soil building commenced in Inis Beag, but the process is an archaic one and is practiced in other communities along the Atlantic seaboard where appropriate seaweeds are available. Today, between 45 and 50 percent of the land surface of the island is

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*Figure 5. Improving a garden with compost unloaded on seaweed*

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654 the agent are providing seed potatoes and overseeing the construction of fences, fields, reservoirs, and outbuildings subsidized by the government.

241 The average sized farm of a fourth has approximately half of its acreage in quarter- and half-acre gardens; the other half is divided fairly evenly between larger plots containing indigenous soils used for grazing and those enclosing lime-
[654] stone pavement, or "crags." Gardens are smaller in size because subsidies for their
[435] manufacture are paid according to the quarter-acre—7 pounds and 10 shillings when a potato crop is grown—and a field this size can be converted into a garden comfortably in the period of a year. Most landholders plant from a half-acre to a full acre of potatoes yearly, and it is estimated that a quarter-acre will produce,
[438] under normal weather conditions, nearly four tons of "spuds." According to the agricultural agent, the use of human manure as a fertilizer accounts for such a
[439] high yield. The amount of potatoes consumed depends, of course, on the size of the householder's family, but many farmers export surpluses the following summer before new spuds are harvested.

"Improving" refers both to developing a new garden and to enriching an old one with compost (see Fig. 5). New plots usually are manufactured in areas containing indigenous soils, so as to lessen the labor required. If a garden is to be "laid" on pavement, a much fissured area is chosen so that adequate drainage is afforded. The plot is leveled by removing protruding stones with crowbar and sledge hammer (not by throwing a huge boulder from above the head, as shown in the aforementioned film), and fissures are filled with small rocks to the extent
[333] that soil components added later will not filter down. Large stones are placed in
[654] fences which surround the field, for which the government pays the farmer, or farmers, involved in their construction 2 pounds for each 22 yards raised 4 feet. Writers describing the local milieu seldom fail to mention that fences are numer-

16:Messenger E-4,5 (1955-1966) 1969 ER6 Rural Irish ER6
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ous and high in Inis Beag so as to prevent the sparse soils from being blown away by Atlantic gales; the truth of the matter is that fences serve as boundaries, are repositories for uprooted rocks that farmers, understandably, do not wish to transport long distances, and by their very construction provide a source of income. Once a field is leveled, it is spread with sand, compost, and sometimes indigenous soils carried from other areas to enrich the new garden. This is a job which is carried on the year around, and children often are pressed into service, loading creels with sand from the strand and common land and driving laden animals to the plots above.

Newly made fields can grow potatoes two years in succession before being fallowed, but old ones must lie fallow four years until the eelworm disappears. The folk, however, plant spuds in their old plots every six to ten years, when moss has accumulated to such a degree that the growth of grass sufficient for grazing and haying is impeded. The potato planting technique is known as the "ridge-and-furrow" or "lazy-bed" method on the mainland, but these terms are not used in Inis Beag. Setting a garden involves first of all constructing parallel "ridges," about 30 inches in width, the length of a field. "Ditches" are dug with a spade, and sods are "turned over" onto strips of seaweed; then more dirt is "trenched" over other seaweed, compost, guano, and chemical fertilizers placed in the center of the ridges (see Fig. 6). The whole procedure is called "manuring," and two months later the garden is again trenched with dirt distributed at the base of the sprouting vines. Between the time of seeding and harvesting, the plot is weeded by hand once or twice and sprayed two or three times with a mixture of copper sulphate and water to combat the potato blight.

Potato seeds are purchased in sacks from the agricultural agent or obtained from the previous year's crop, and it takes almost 100 pounds of seed to plant a



*Figure 6. Soil being trenched in setting a garden*

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*Figure 7. Harvesting spuds near the lake below Terrace Village*

seed is thrown out by hand and the top soil turned over by spade to cover it, a task often shared by a man and his offspring. The farmer who wishes to use a plot only for growing hay usually will seed it during the spring after it has yielded spuds and will not permit animals to graze on it until it has been cut and the hay stored. No further seeding is required after the initial one, even though ten years may elapse before potatoes once again are planted. 246 221

The tools employed in cutting and stacking hay are the sickle, called a "reaping hook," the scythe, the pitchfork, and the rake. Most are imported, but a few men own handmade rakes whose parts are wooden and fitted together. The farmers substitute wide brimmed felt hats for their usual caps when haying, and do so again a month later when "pulling" rye; the hat is purported to be cooler than the cap and affords protection to the neck of the wearer when he bends over for long spells under a hot sun. Many folk claim that cutting hay is the most strenuous of their jobs on land or sea, but the men work slowly and rest often, just as they do when engaged in other arduous tasks, some of which appear to the outsider to demand a greater output of energy than manipulating a sickle or scythe. Once cut, hay is raked into parallel rows across the field for drying, then formed into cocks, known as "saving the hay," by hand or using a rake, "fork," or scythe. It is possible to stack hay into cocks 24 hours after cutting it, then to transport it to barns and outbuildings after a like period of time (see Fig. 8), but rain and the press of other duties can prolong the operation for as long as two weeks. Seeds for autumn planting are shaken from the hay on the floor of the storage building before the crop is stacked away to furnish winter fodder. 246 [293] [461] [343]

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*Figure 8. Transporting hay to an outbuilding*

249 Those islanders who dwell in thatched houses or who own other buildings which are thatched grow rye, as do a few farmers who use it as fodder. It is planted in recently dug potato fields at the same time as grass and is ready for harvesting the next August. Rye for thatching is pulled rather than cut, and compressed into [342] small bundles which are propped against fences for drying. Pulling is preferred because grass and weeds can be separated out, and the roots will furnish friction [343] to keep the bundles from slipping when they are placed on the roof later. After drying, the bundles are carried to barns or outbuildings to be flailed, winnowed, and stored until used a month or two afterward. Flailing is done by striking the tops of the bundled plants against a stone placed a foot from an indoor wall, in such a way that the seeds are separated and collected at the base of the wall. Later the grain is spread on a flagging and winnowed by allowing handfuls of seed to [246] fall to the rock surface so that wind blows away the chaff. Rye used as fodder is planted with grass and cut when "green" at the same time that hay is cut, and is handled in almost the same way as the latter.

## Care of Livestock

175 The export of fish, kelp, pigs, cattle, and sheep accounted for 90 percent
434 of the income of Inis Beag folk in 1893, as reported by the Congested Districts
437 Board. The sale of cattle and sheep ranked last, for at that time indigenous soils
[311] were not adequate either in extent or grass yield to support many livestock, and
178 fields on the terraces were used mostly for farming. But over the past 70 years
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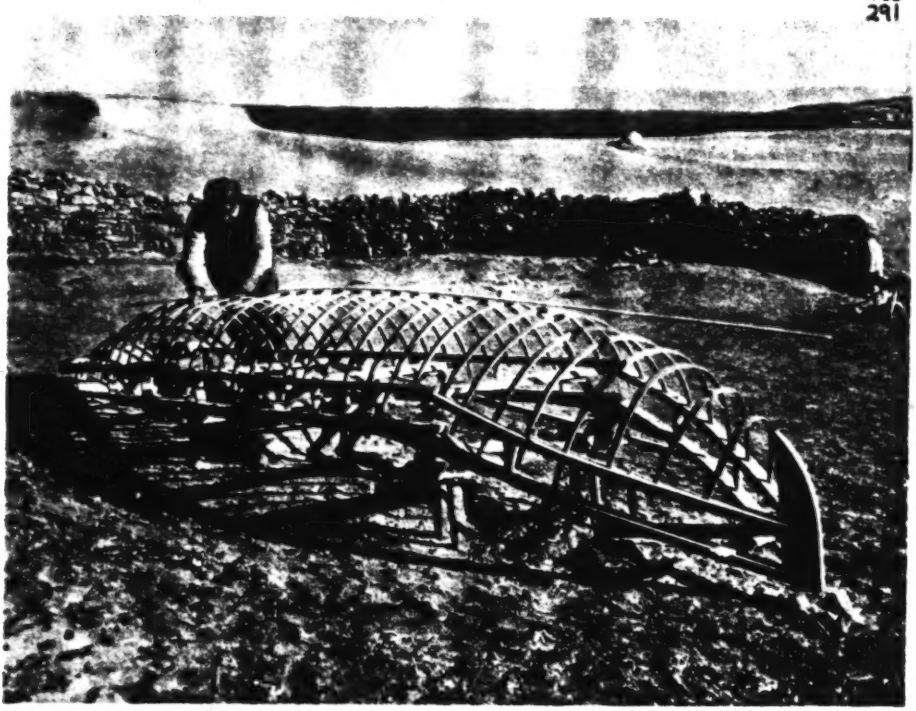


*Figure 10. Assembling lathes in the construction of a canoe*

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folk of neighboring islands as well as mainland seamen for many miles around. A *curach* takes a week of steady work to construct, and the builder is paid 6 pounds for his labor and a shopkeeper 12 pounds for the materials.

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The curate blesses a newly manufactured canoe, and a small bottle of holy water is kept in its bow to afford the crew magical protection. Some fishermen seek further spiritual assistance by tipping their caps and making the sign of the cross with salt water before shoving off, especially if they are about to encounter hazardous weather conditions or are to make a long voyage. One of the many omens known to the folk is a "prayer to guide you safely," passed down from the time of St. Patrick, it is claimed, which is uttered by fishermen ready to put out to sea; if two mistakes are made in its recitation, danger is in the offing and the trip is postponed or cancelled. Another sign of impending peril which will cause postponement of a fishing trip is for one of the crew to meet a red-haired woman on the trail as he walks to the strand to embark.

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The knit sweater, called a "ganzie," is not a traditional item of wear, as is

16:Messenger E-4,5 (1955-1966) 1969 ER6 Rural Irish ER6
(1959-1960) Inis Beag

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*Figure 12. Copper-Bronze Age tumulus—home of the pookah*

776 [171] black dog which roams the road by the Catholic church and cemetery in the village of St. Patrick, altering its size instantaneously (Messenger 1967:37–38).

754 178 Witchcraft once flourished in Inis Beag, so it is held, but today only the casting of the evil eye still is practiced. The most common witch of the past was an ugly old woman, called a "hag witch," who was native to Inis Beag or a transient nighttime intruder from nearby islands and the mainland. She was able to fly through the air swiftly, make herself invisible, assume any size or shape, enter the body of an animal, and perpetrate black magic. Her favorite animal familiar was the rabbit and her favorite target the cow, whose milk she purloined after midnight from beasts pastured at the back of the island. Like the trooping fairies, she too stole the souls of children and left ailing changelings in their stead. When it was suspected by parents that a child was a changeling rather than their human offspring, it was customary to throw it into the fireplace or burn the bedding on which it lay in order to retrieve the departed soul; if the perpetrator were a witch, she would leap from the flames with a "wild shriek" and vanish, leaving the restored child in perfect health in her place. I was told in Inis Thiar of islanders there who bear scars from being burned when their souls were rescued by this expediency.

754 753 755 855

754 [624] [576] Three Inis Beag persons are accused of possessing the evil eye and thus are shunned by their fellows. Such a witch is known by a disfigurement in or near his left eye, from which the malignant force emanates, and by his ability to cause